CONAN THE BARBARIAN

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

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THE BARBARIAN

barry smith

CONAN AND ELRIC BATTLE SIDE BY SIDE AGAINST···

THE HELL-HORDES OF CHAOS!

CONAN THE BARBARIAN!™

THE GREEN EMPRESS of MELNIBONE
THE ROAD TO THE SIGHING LAKE BOILS WITH DEMONIC LIFE, AS THREE ODDLY-MATCHED COMPANIONS NEAR THE STEPPES WHICH BORDER ON EASTERN KOTH--
CONAN--ELRIC--OVER HERE--!
STILL YOUR TONGUE, GIRL!
THERE'S EVIL ENOUGH ON EVERY SIDE, THIS DARKSOME NIGHT!
PLOTTED BY: MICHAEL MOORCOCK, CREATOR OF ELRIC, and J. CAWTHORN
FEATURING THE EPIC HERO CREATED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD
STAN LEE PRESENTS
ROY THOMAS WRITER
BARRY SMITH ARTIST
BUSCEMA AND SMITH, INKERS • SAM ROSEN, LETTERER

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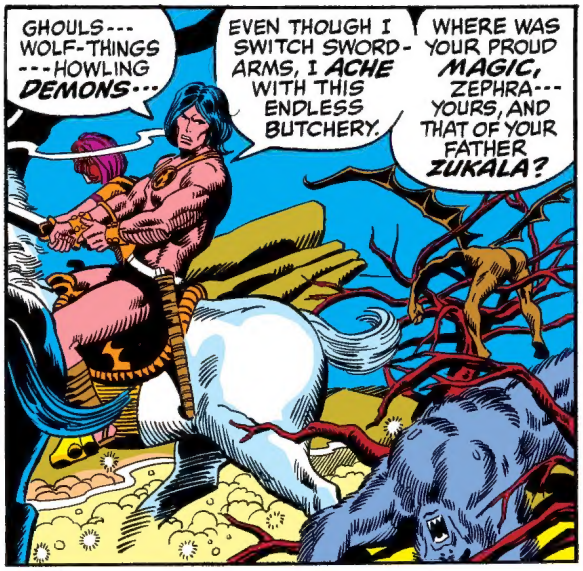
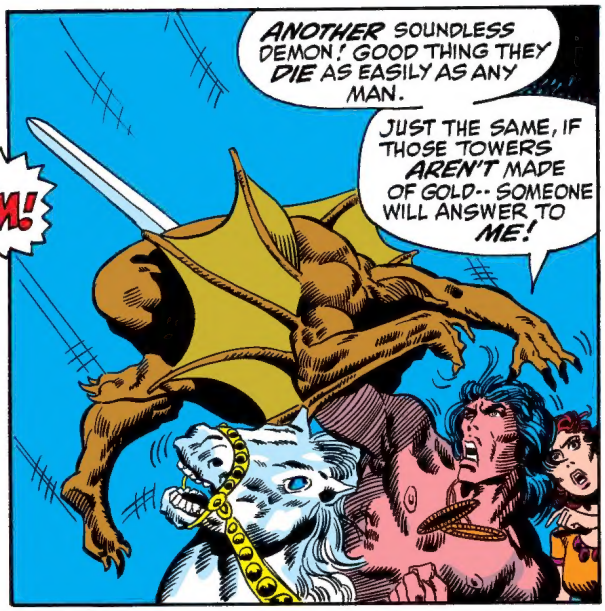

GHOULS--- WOLF-THINGS ---HOWLING DEMONS---
EVEN THOUGH I SWITCH SWORD-ARMS, I ACHE WITH THIS ENDLESS BUTCHERY.
WHERE WAS YOUR PROUD MAGIC, ZEPHRA--- YOURS, AND THAT OF YOUR FATHER ZUKALA?

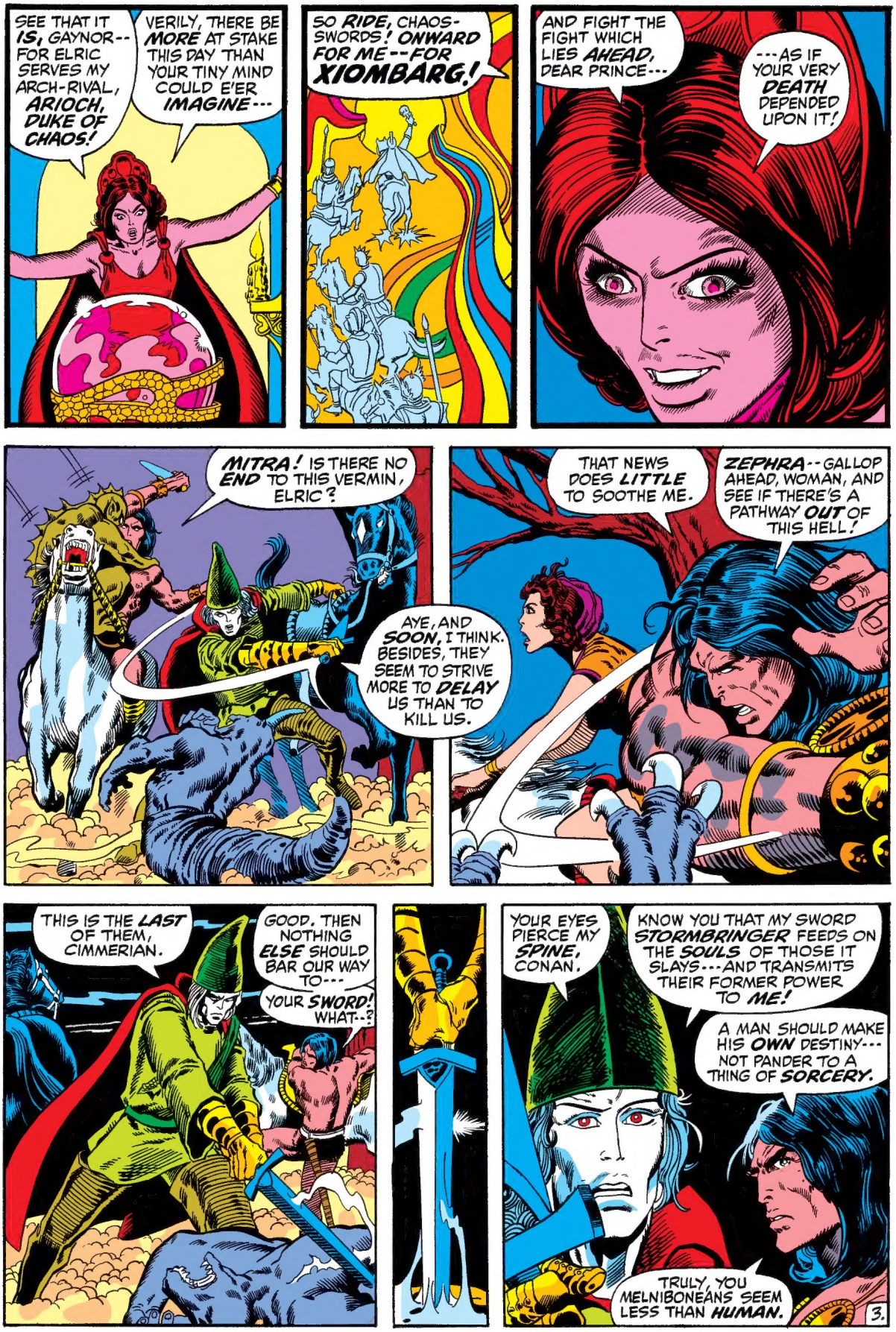
ALL MY SORCERY DERIVES FROM MY SIRE--- AND HIS AGE-ENFEEBLED POWERS CANNOT HELP US WHILE HE IS FAR AWAY.
KUHN! WHAT USE IS MAGIC, IF IT CAN BE HURLED NO FURTHER THAN A GOOD SPEAR?
BY THE GODS, IF I'D NOT VOWED TO HELP YOU FIND THE GOLD-TOWERED CITY YOU SEEK, I'D---
CONAN-- ABOVE YOU--!

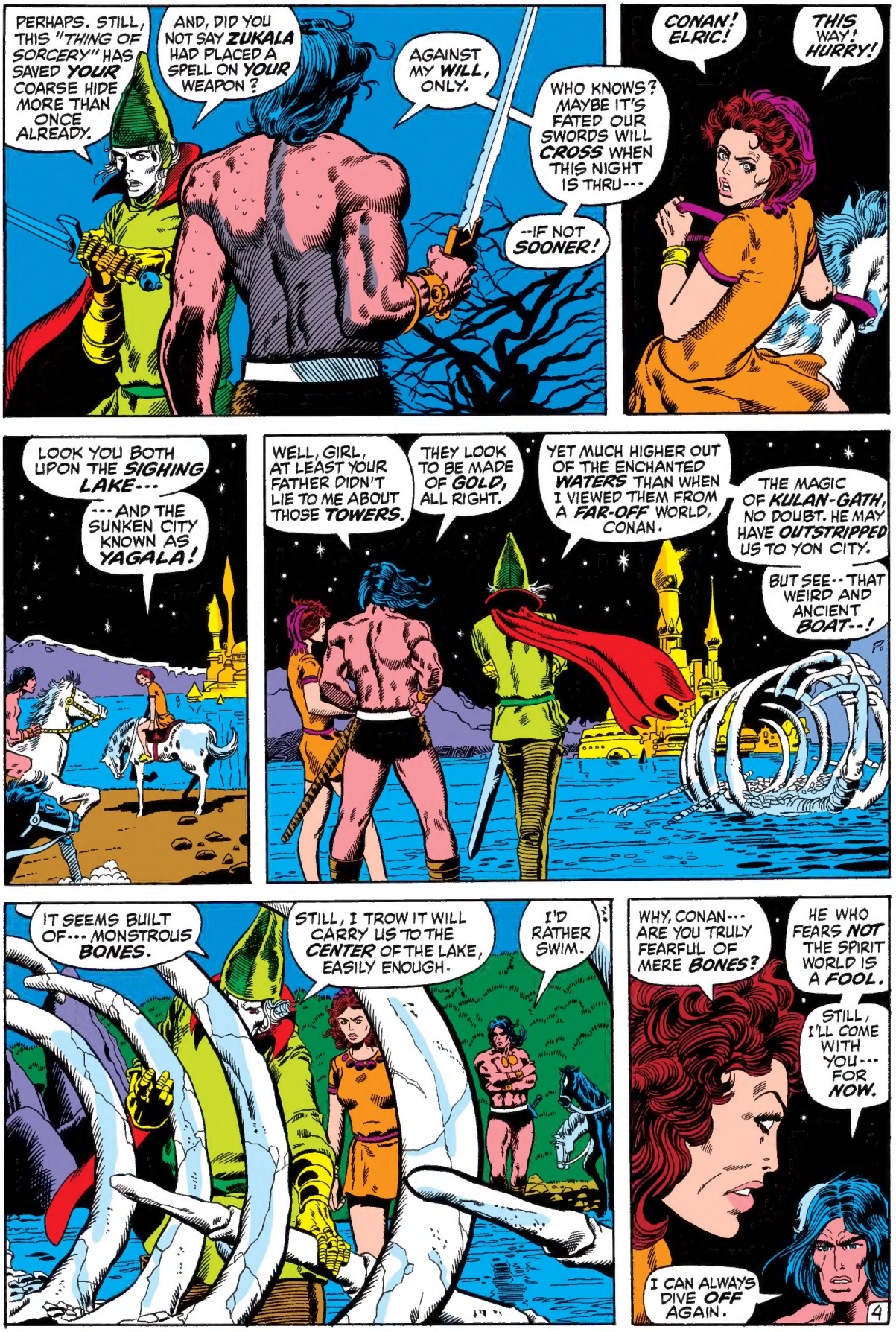
CROM!

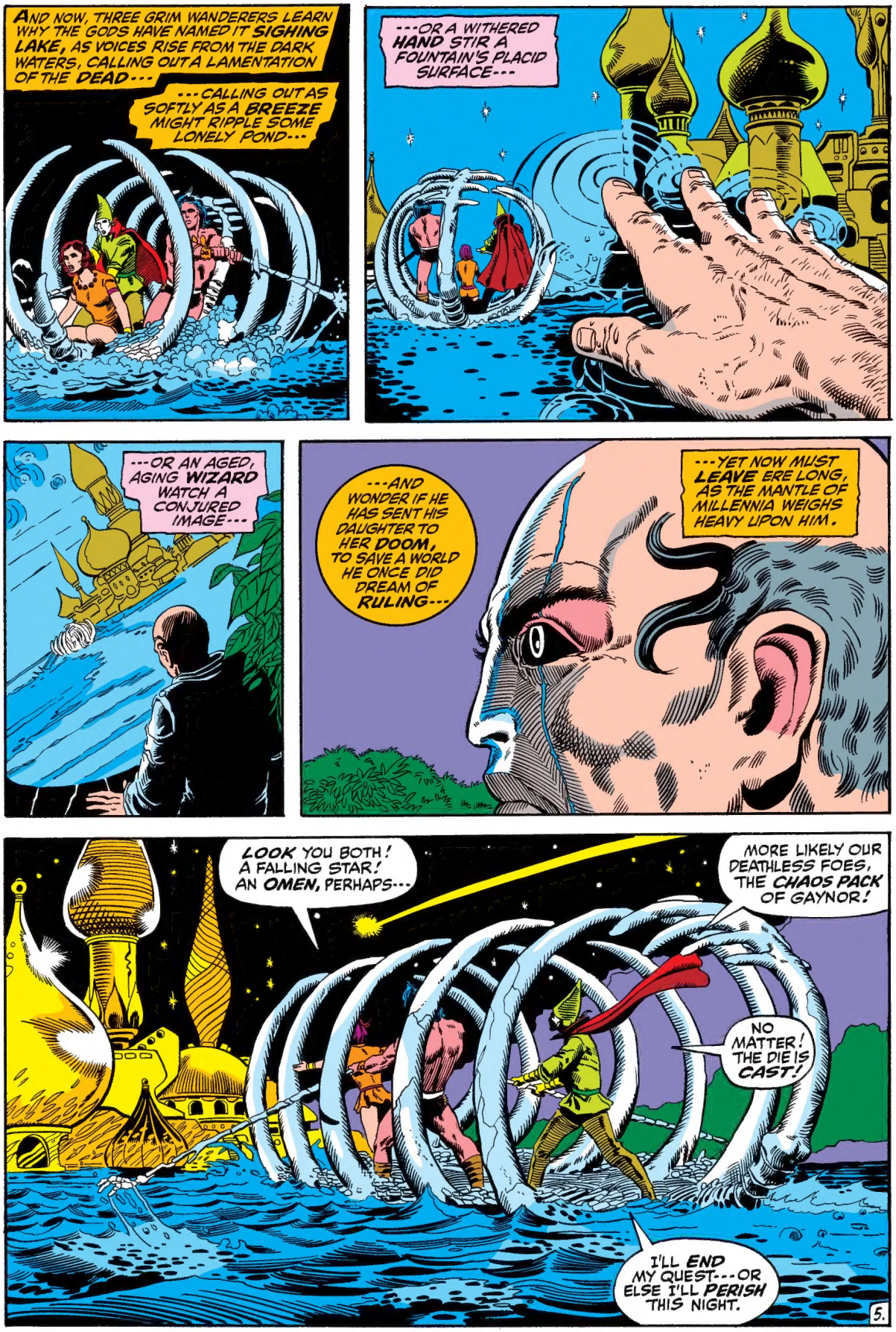

ANOTHER SOUNDLESS DEMON! GOOD THING THEY DIE AS EASILY AS ANY MAN.
JUST THE SAME, IF THOSE TOWERS AREN'T MADE OF GOLD-- SOMEONE WILL ANSWER TO ME!

WHILE, IN SOME FAR-OFF NETHERWORLD, HELLISH ANGER DISTORTS A HEAVENLY FACE---
YOU FAILED, PRINCE GAYNOR---
---FAILED TO VANQUISH ELRIC AND HIS BARBARIAN COMPANION.
IS THIS HOW YOU WOULD EARN THE ETERNAL OBLIVION YOU DESIRE?
THE MORTALS WON BUT THE MEREST SKIRMISH, O QUEEN OF CHAOS SWORDS---

IT IS STILL THY PROTÉGÉ, KULAN-GATH OF STYGIA, WHO EVEN NOW IS FIRST TO REACH THE SUNKEN SPIRES OF YAGALA.
AND, THOUGH IT BE WRIT LARGE THAT ONLY A MORTAL WIZARD MAY ROUSE THE GREEN EMPRESS WHO SLEEPS THEREIN---
---IT SHALL BE HE, NOT THE HATED ELRIC, WHO SPEAKS THE SPELL OF AWAKENING!
2

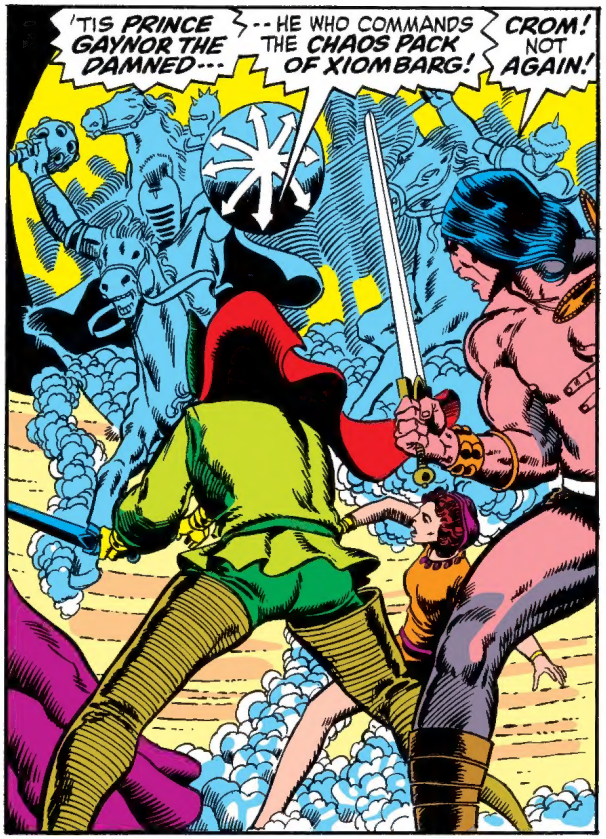

SEE THAT IT IS, GAYNOR--FOR ELRIC SERVES MY ARCH-RIVAL, ARIOCH, DUKE OF CHAOS!
VERILY, THERE BE MORE AT STAKE THIS DAY THAN YOUR TINY MIND COULD E'ER IMAGINE---
SO RIDE, CHAOS-SWORDS! ONWARD FOR ME--FOR XIOMBARG!
AND FIGHT THE FIGHT WHICH LIES AHEAD, DEAR PRINCE---
---AS IF YOUR VERY DEATH DEPENDED UPON IT!
MITRA! IS THERE NO END TO THIS VERMIN, ELRIC?
AYE, AND SOON, I THINK. BESIDES, THEY SEEM TO STRIVE MORE TO DELAY US THAN TO KILL US.
THAT NEWS DOES LITTLE TO SOOTHE ME.
ZEPHRA--GALLOP AHEAD, WOMAN, AND SEE IF THERE'S A PATHWAY OUT OF THIS HELL!
THIS IS THE LAST OF THEM, CIMMERIAN.
GOOD. THEN NOTHING ELSE SHOULD BAR OUR WAY TO---
YOUR SWORD! WHAT--?
YOUR EYES PIERCE MY SPINE, CONAN.
KNOW YOU THAT MY SWORD STORMBRINGER FEEDS ON THE SOULS OF THOSE IT SLAYS---AND TRANSMITS THEIR FORMER POWER TO ME!
A MAN SHOULD MAKE HIS OWN DESTINY---NOT PANDER TO A THING OF SORCERY.
TRULY, YOU MELNIBONEANS SEEM LESS THAN HUMAN.
3.


PERHAPS. STILL, THIS "THING OF SORCERY" HAS SAVED YOUR COARSE HIDE MORE THAN ONCE ALREADY.
AND, DID YOU NOT SAY ZUKALA HAD PLACED A SPELL ON YOUR WEAPON?
AGAINST MY WILL, ONLY.
WHO KNOWS? MAYBE IT'S FATED OUR SWORDS WILL CROSS WHEN THIS NIGHT IS THRU---
--IF NOT SOONER!
CONAN! ELRIC!
THIS WAY! HURRY!
LOOK YOU BOTH UPON THE SIGHING LAKE---
---AND THE SUNKEN CITY KNOWN AS YAGALA!
WELL, GIRL, AT LEAST YOUR FATHER DIDN'T LIE TO ME ABOUT THOSE TOWERS.
THEY LOOK TO BE MADE OF GOLD, ALL RIGHT.
YET MUCH HIGHER OUT OF THE ENCHANTED WATERS THAN WHEN I VIEWED THEM FROM A FAR-OFF WORLD, CONAN.
THE MAGIC OF KULAN-GATH, NO DOUBT. HE MAY HAVE OUTSTRIPPED US TO YON CITY.
BUT SEE--THAT WEIRD AND ANCIENT BOAT--!
IT SEEMS BUILT OF---MONSTROUS BONES.
STILL, I TROW IT WILL CARRY US TO THE CENTER OF THE LAKE, EASILY ENOUGH.
I'D RATHER SWIM.
WHY, CONAN--- ARE YOU TRULY FEARFUL OF MERE BONES?
HE WHO FEARS NOT THE SPIRIT WORLD IS A FOOL.
STILL, I'LL COME WITH YOU--- FOR NOW.
I CAN ALWAYS DIVE OFF AGAIN.
4

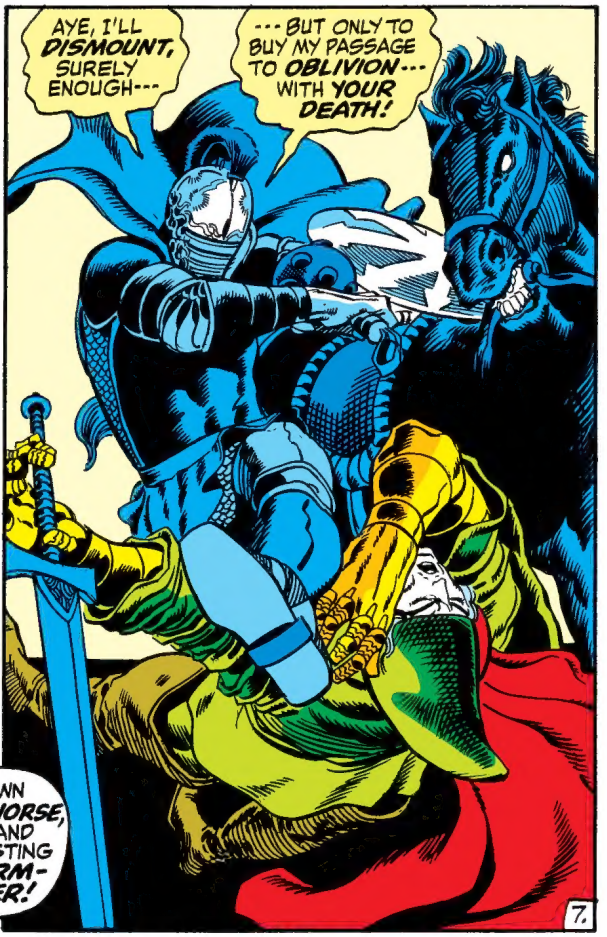

AND NOW, THREE GRIM WANDERERS LEARN WHY THE GODS HAVE NAMED IT SIGHING LAKE, AS VOICES RISE FROM THE DARK WATERS, CALLING OUT A LAMENTATION OF THE DEAD---
---CALLING OUT AS SOFTLY AS A BREEZE MIGHT RIPPLE SOME LONELY POND---
---OR A WITHERED HAND STIR A FOUNTAIN'S PLACID SURFACE---
---OR AN AGED, AGING WIZARD WATCH A CONJURED IMAGE---
---AND WONDER IF HE HAS SENT HIS DAUGHTER TO HER DOOM, TO SAVE A WORLD HE ONCE DID DREAM OF RULING---
---YET NOW MUST LEAVE ERE LONG, AS THE MANTLE OF MILLENNIA WEIGHS HEAVY UPON HIM.
LOOK YOU BOTH! A FALLING STAR! AN OMEN, PERHAPS---
MORE LIKELY OUR DEATHLESS FOES, THE CHAOS PACK OF GAYNOR!
NO MATTER! THE DIE IS CAST!
I'LL END MY QUEST---OR ELSE I'LL PERISH THIS NIGHT.
5.

WE'RE HERE!
YOU HINTED EARLIER OF A "QUEST", SORCERER--
I THINK I'D LIKE TO HEAR MORE OF IT NOW---
--SINCE WE ALL MAY DIE IN ITS FULFILL-MENT.
AS I SAID BEFORE, BARBARIAN---SEEK NOT TO KNOW ALL THE SECRETS OF ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ!
SUFFICE IT TO SAY--- IT CONCERNS A GIRL.
WHAT DOESN'T?
ELRIC--- THAT LIGHTED WINDOW--
THIS SMELL OF INCENSE..
AYE, ZEPHRA. IT CAN ONLY BE---
---KULAN-GATH!
RISE, YE MISTS--YE VAPORS, BILLOW--!
SUMMON FORTH THE GREAT GREEN EMPRESS, SHE WHO---
NAY, WIZARD! MY EVIL ANCESTRESS MUST NOT RISE FROM HER WATERY TOMB.
SAY THE WORD, ALBINO, AND I'LL CARVE THE STYGIAN LIKE A PIG ON A SPIT!
STAY BACK! WHOEVER YOU BE, YOU CANNOT STOP ME NOW. YOU MUST NOT!
THE DREAM I DREAMED TOLD ME I WOULD BE SUPREME IF I AWAKENED DREAD TERHALI---
--- THAT SHE WOULD REVEAL MYSTERIES TO ME WHICH WOULD LAY LOW ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE WEST!
FOOL! IT WAS XIOMBARG, QUEEN OF CHAOS SWORDS, WHO BAITED YOU THUS--- TO USE YOU FOR HER OWN DARK ENDS!
I KNOW OF NO XIOMBARG! IT WAS THOTH-AMON WHO SENT YOU--- AYE, THOTH-AMON!
YET, SERVE ME, AND I'LL PAY YOU FAR MORE THAN HE! I'LL---
MY RIVAL--- THE ONLY MYSTIC IN ALL MY HOMELAND WHOSE MAGIC EXCELS MY OWN!
6

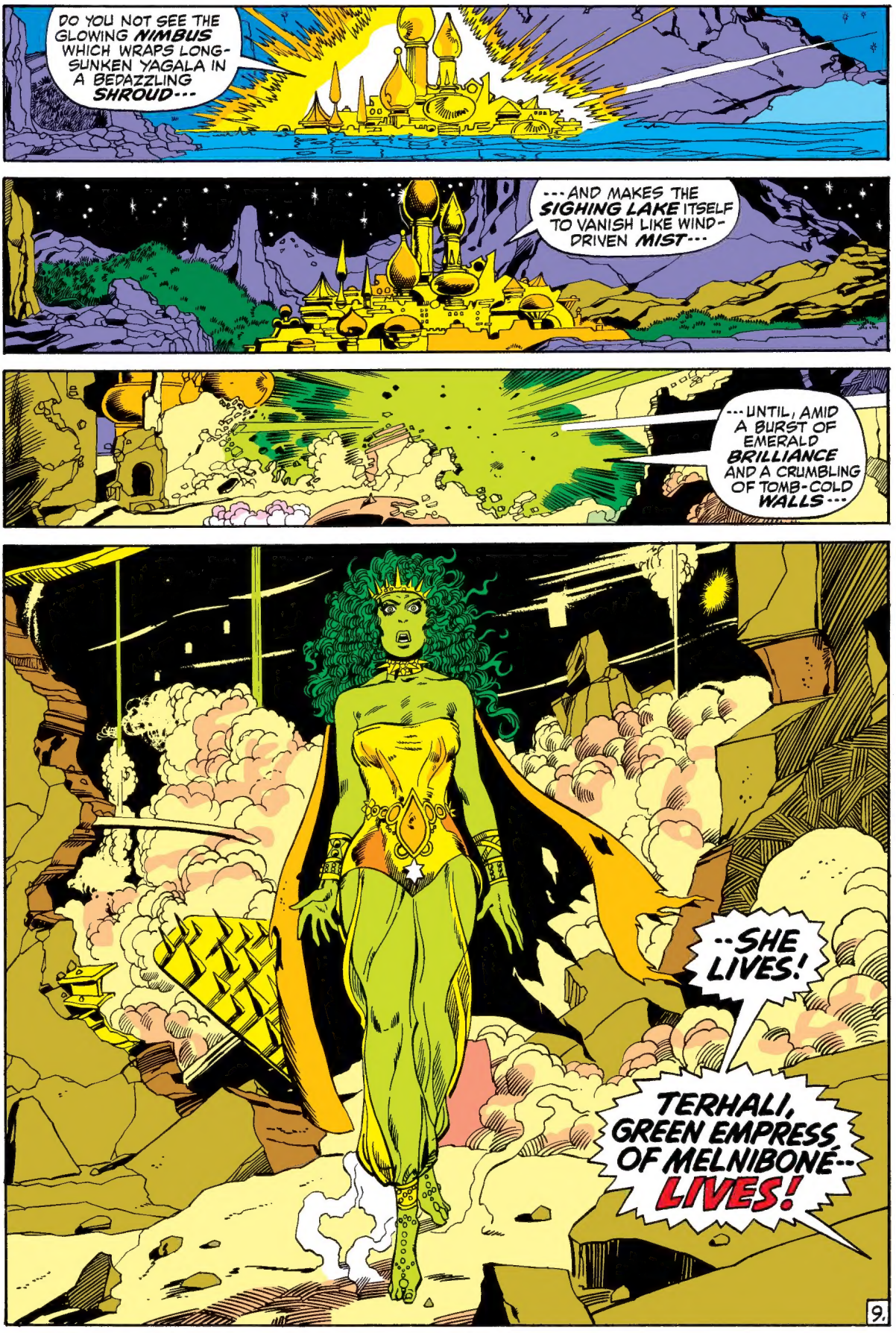
EH? WHAT SUDDEN FLASH TURNS THE VERY WALLS TO SEA-BLUE CLOUDS?
STYGIAN, IF THIS IS SOME WIZARD'S TRICK, I'LL---
I FEAR NOT, CONAN.
'TIS HE WHOM I HAVE BEEN EXPECTING, ALL ALONG.

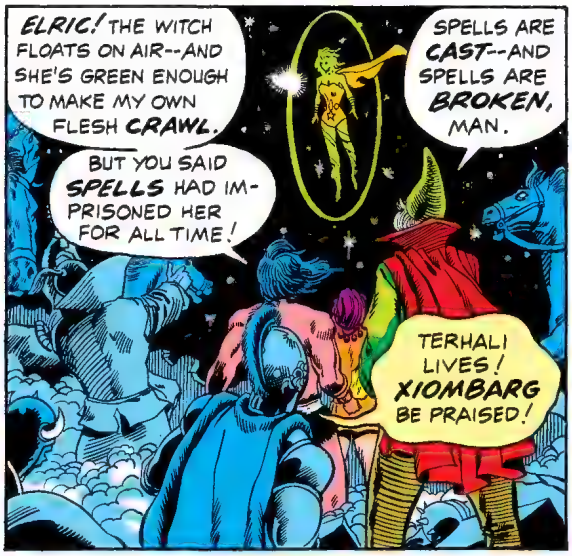

'TIS PRINCE GAYNOR THE DAMNED---
--HE WHO COMMANDS THE CHAOS PACK OF XIOMBARG!
CROM! NOT AGAIN!

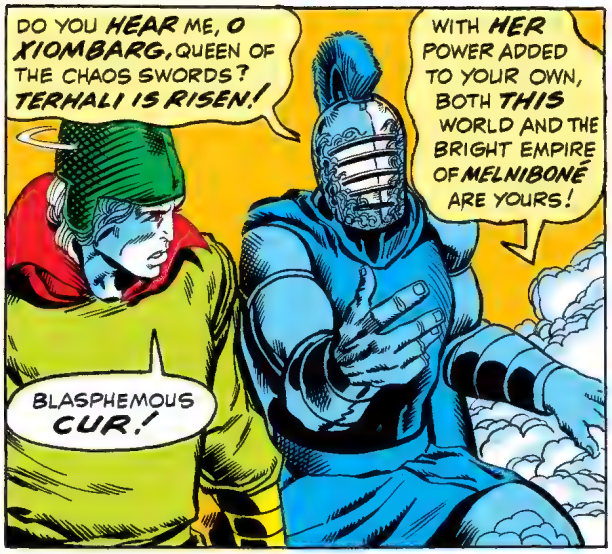
THEN, AS NIGHTMARE SHADOWS DANCE MADLY ON THE VAULTED CEILING OVERHEAD--
---CIMMERIAN AND SORCERER-KING LEAP JUST AS MADLY INTO THE PITCHED, UNEQUAL FRAY!
COME DOWN OFF YOUR HORSE, GAYNOR---AND FACE THE STING OF STORM-BRINGER!


AYE, I'LL DISMOUNT, SURELY ENOUGH---
---BUT ONLY TO BUY MY PASSAGE TO OBLIVION--- WITH YOUR DEATH!

GET UP, PALE-SKIN! STAND UP AND FIGHT BACK AGAINST THESE DEMON-HORDES!
I'LL HACK MY WAY TO YOU -- AND TREAD A PATHWAY OF SKULLS, IF I MUST.
NO, CONAN -- IT IS NOT ELRIC WHO MUST CONCERN YOU NOW.
KULAN-GATH RETURNS TO HIS RUNE-CASTING! IF HE SUCCEEDS--
HE'LL NOT SUCCEED! I SWEAR IT!
I'LL -- WHAT? DO YOU THINK YOU CAN KEEP US BOTH FROM THE STYGIAN, PRINCE GAYNOR?
I MUST! SUCH IS THE WILL OF QUEEN XIOMBARG!
THEN TELL YOUR HELLISH QUEEN---
--THAT CONAN, TOO, HAS A WILL OF IRON!
CROM! I DIDN'T THINK EVEN THIS BEWITCHED SWORD WOULD FELL HIM.
BUT NOW, KULAN-GATH---
--HAS ALREADY COMPLETED HIS OBSCENE RITUAL, I FEAR.
FEAR? AYE--FEAR INDEED, YOU HAPLESS DOGS!
THE RITUAL IS ENDED! THE SPELL IS DULY CAST!
CAN YOU NOT FEEL THE VERY EARTH BEGIN TO TREMBLE 'NEATH YOUR FEET---?
8

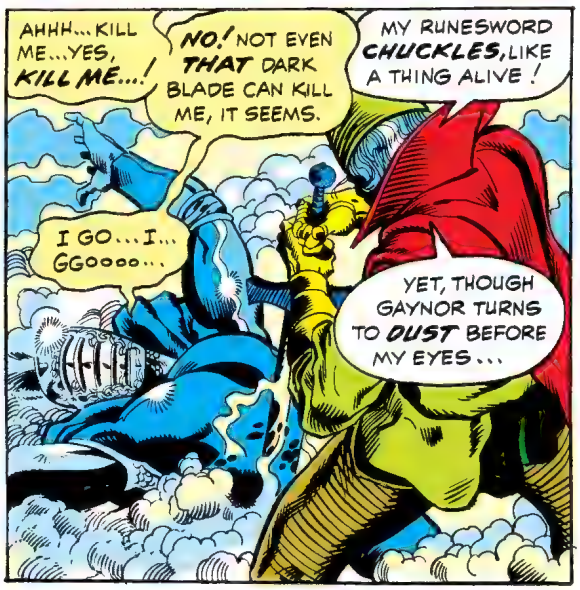

DO YOU NOT SEE THE GLOWING NIMBUS WHICH WRAPS LONG-SUNKEN YAGALA IN A BEDAZZLING SHROUD---
---AND MAKES THE SIGHING LAKE ITSELF TO VANISH LIKE WIND-DRIVEN MIST---
---UNTIL, AMID A BURST OF EMERALD BRILLIANCE AND A CRUMBLING OF TOMB-COLD WALLS---
--SHE LIVES!
TERHALI, GREEN EMPRESS OF MELNIBONÉ--LIVES!
9.

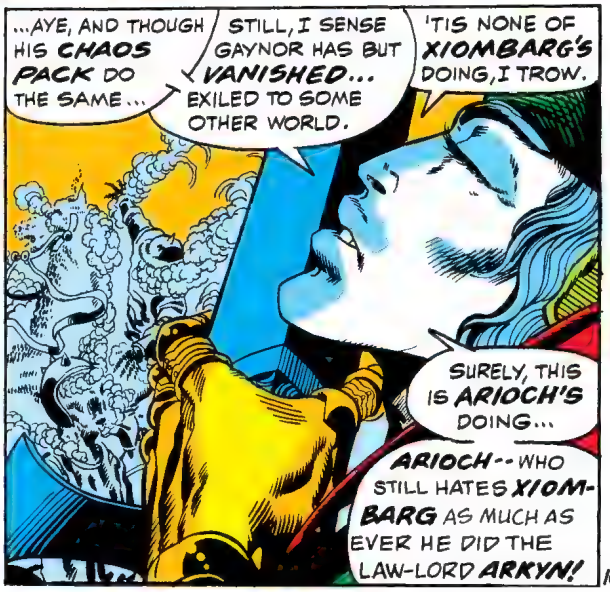

ELRIC! THE WITCH FLOATS ON AIR--AND SHE'S GREEN ENOUGH TO MAKE MY OWN FLESH CRAWL.
BUT YOU SAID SPELLS HAD IMPRISONED HER FOR ALL TIME!
SPELLS ARE CAST--AND SPELLS ARE BROKEN, MAN.
TERHALI LIVES! XIOMBARG BE PRAISED!


DO YOU HEAR ME, O XIOMBARG, QUEEN OF THE CHAOS SWORDS? TERHALI IS RISEN!
WITH HER POWER ADDED TO YOUR OWN, BOTH THIS WORLD AND THE BRIGHT EMPIRE OF MELNIBONÉ ARE YOURS!
BLASPHEMOUS CUR!

MELNIBONÉ SERVES ONLY ARIOCH, DUKE OF CHAOS...

...AS DOES ELRIC, MASTER OF STORMBRINGER!


AHHH... KILL ME...YES, KILL ME...!
NO! NOT EVEN THAT DARK BLADE CAN KILL ME, IT SEEMS.
MY RUNESWORD CHUCKLES, LIKE A THING ALIVE!
I GO... I... GOoooo...
YET, THOUGH GAYNOR TURNS TO DUST BEFORE MY EYES...

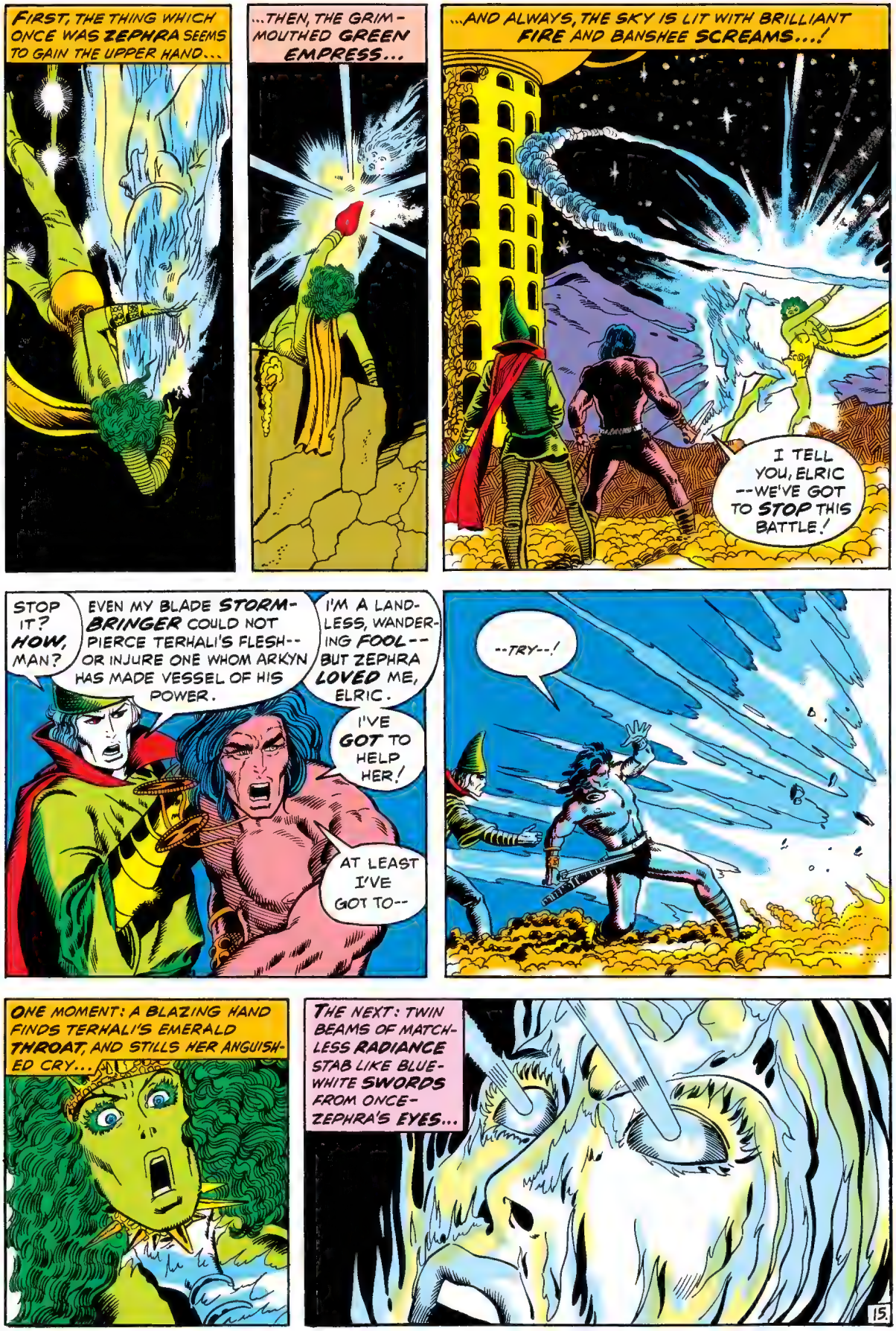

...AYE, AND THOUGH HIS CHAOS PACK DO THE SAME...
STILL, I SENSE GAYNOR HAS BUT VANISHED... EXILED TO SOME OTHER WORLD.
'TIS NONE OF XIOMBARG'S DOING, I TROW.
SURELY, THIS IS ARIOCH'S DOING...
ARIOCH -- WHO STILL HATES XIOMBARG AS MUCH AS EVER HE DID THE LAW-LORD ARKYN!

"ARIOCH"? "ARKYN"? MY HEAD ACHES WITH NAMES I HAVE NO FACES FOR.
I SHOULD HAVE RIDDEN ON TOWARD ARGOS, AND NOT BEEN SWAYED BY LIES OF EASY LOOTING!
AND NOW WHAT'S THAT DEVIL KULAN-GATH MOANING ABOUT...?
DREAD TERHALI... YOU WHO ARE SPAWN OF TWO TIMES, TWO WORLDS...
IT IS I WHO CAST THE RUNES WHICH WOKE YOU...AND I ALONE YOU MUST OBEY!
OBEY? OBEY?
TERHALI WAS NOT BORN TO OBEY...
...BUT TO RULE!
AND MORE --TO DESTROY!
YOU THREE I'LL LET LIVE...AS THE FIRST OF MY SLAVES.
SOON, YAGALA WILL TEEM WITH SLAVES ONCE MORE. THEN, I'LL CONQUER THIS DIM WORLD...
...AND EVEN MELNIBONÉ WILL BE MINE AGAIN.
I RULE IN MELNIBONÉ...
...OR AT LEAST, I DID WHEN I LEFT THE BRIGHT EMPIRE, ANCESTRESS.
I JOURNEYED HERE 'CROSS SPACE AND TIME, TO ASK A FAVOR...
FAVOR? TERHALI GRANTS NO FAVORS TO SLAVES...LEST IT BE TO LET THEM SERVE HER!
FOR CROM'S SAKE, MAN--DON'T ANGER HER!

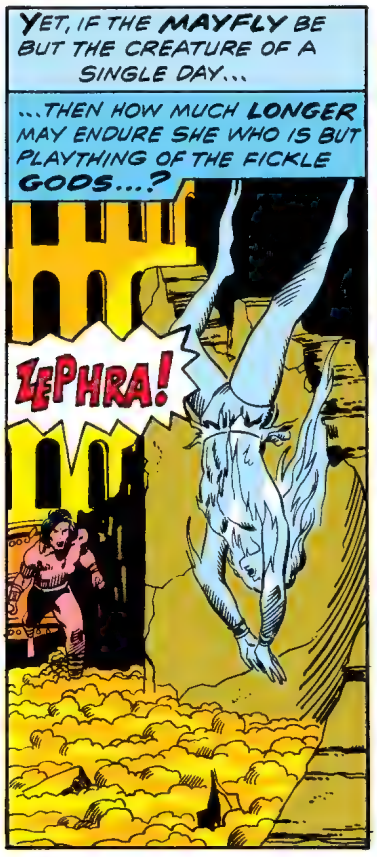
TOO LATE, FOOLS! I AM ALREADY ANGERED.
WELL THEN, WE SHALL HAVE TO SEE IF A LIVING KING...
...CAN SLAY A QUEEN WHO SHOULD BE DEAD!
I'LL STRIKE AS WELL, ELRIC...
TWO SORCEROUS BLADES: STRIKING ALMOST AS ONE THE AURA WHICH SHIMMERS ABOUT THE GRIM GREEN EMPRESS...
TWO PAIN-WRACKED MEN: TOSSED BACK AS THOUGH STRUCK BY SUDDEN LIGHTNING...
...NOW LYING SENSELESS, NAKED, BEFORE A SHE-DEMON'S LETHAL FURY...!
AND YOU, GIRL? WHO ARE YOU, THAT YOU DO NOT FLEE IN BOOTLESS FEAR BEFORE MY WRATH?
I AM ZEPHRA, DAUGHTER OF ZUKALA...
AND I FEAR NOT YOU, NOR DEATH!
THERE WOULD BE MORE WORDS... BUT THEN, FROM THE DARKLING SKY ABOVE...
...A SHAFT OF BLINDING LIGHT SPEARS DOWN...
...ENVELOPING NAUGHT BUT ZEPHRA...!
ELDRITCH MAGIC! I KNOW THE SIGNS WELL! BUT WHO--?
IT IS-- ARKYN!
HE WHO RULES THE LORDS OF LAW!
AYE, ZEPHRA! THY FATHER TUTORED THEE WELL IN THE WAR WHICH RAGES 'TWIXT THE FORCES OF LAW AND CHAOS!
YOU KNOW WE LORDS OF LAW MAY INTERVENE IN EARTHLY MATTERS ONLY THRU MORTAL VESSELS!
WILL YOU BECOME THAT VESSEL THIS NIGHT, ZEPHRA? WILL YOU BE USED TO DESTROY TERHALI?
WILL YOU??
12

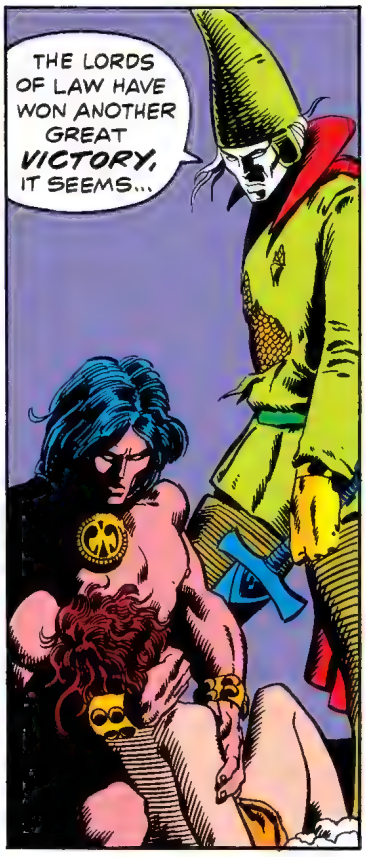
THEN, AS TIME SEEMS TO STAY ITS TREAD, THE LAW-LORD'S WORDS ARE HEARD IN FAR-OFF PLACES...
...IN THE NETHERWORLD CHAMBER OF QUEEN XIOMBARG...
ARKYN SEEKS TO THWART THE WORK OF UNTOLD EONS.
HE DESIRES HYBORIA AND MELNIBONÉ FOR HIS OWN, BUT THEY ARE MINE--MINE!
...AND IN THE ORDERED GARDENS OF THE WIZARD ZUKALA, IN DISTANT KOTH...
NO, MY LORD ARKYN --YOU MUST NOT DO THIS THING!
SUCH POWER AS YOU WOULD BESTOW IS TOO GREAT FOR MORTAL FLESH TO CONTAIN.
YOU WILL KILL HER-- KILL MY DAUGHTER!
BUT ECHOES DIE, MUTED, IN NOOKS AND CRANNIES...
WHILE IN THE GREEN AND GROWING SILENCE, ZUKALA HEARS NAUGHT BESIDE HIS OWN SAD HEARTBEAT...
...AND A BREEZE WHICH WHISPERS IN A TONGUE UNKNOWN...
AS, MANY LEAGUES HENCE, ZEPHRA GIVES HER ANSWER...
I AM YOUR SERVANT, LORD ARKYN.
DO WITH ME--AS YOU WILL!
BY ALL THE GODS OF MY BLACKSMITH FATHER!
IS THE GIRL-- ON FIRE??
ZEPHRAAA
13

HAAAAAAAAA
WHAT MADNESS IS THIS? THE MORTAL WENCH IS BECOME A PILLAR OF BLUE-WHITE FLAME!
DON'T MOVE, GIRL! I'LL HELP YOU--!
CONAN --NO! DON'T TOUCH HER!
ELRIC SPEAKS --THE TRUTH, CONAN. YOU-- CANNOT HELP--ME.
NO LONGER--AM I ZEPHRA. NO LONGER AM I-- ZUKALA'S DAUGHTER.
NOW AM I THE AVENGER OF ARKYN--
--SHE WHO WOULD DEAL DEATH TO DEATHLESS TERHALI!
STAY BACK-- BACK--!!
THEN, ALBINO AND BARBARIAN WATCH, AGHAST, AS WOMAN OF FIRE GRAPPLES O'ERHEAD WITH SORCERESS OF HELLISH GREEN...
...AS AGE-OLD MAGIC OUT OF MYSTERIOUS MELNIBONÉ MEETS THE POWER OF THE TIMELESS LORDS OF LAW...
...AND CAN ANY DOUBT THAT THE FATE OF WORLDS HANGS HEAVY IN THE BALANCE....?
14


FIRST, THE THING WHICH ONCE WAS ZEPHRA SEEMS TO GAIN THE UPPER HAND...
...THEN, THE GRIM-MOUTHED GREEN EMPRESS...
...AND ALWAYS, THE SKY IS LIT WITH BRILLIANT FIRE AND BANSHEE SCREAMS...!
I TELL YOU, ELRIC --WE'VE GOT TO STOP THIS BATTLE!
STOP IT? HOW, MAN?
EVEN MY BLADE STORM-BRINGER COULD NOT PIERCE TERHALI'S FLESH-- OR INJURE ONE WHOM ARKYN HAS MADE VESSEL OF HIS POWER.
I'M A LAND-LESS, WANDER-ING FOOL-- BUT ZEPHRA LOVED ME, ELRIC.
I'VE GOT TO HELP HER!
AT LEAST I'VE GOT TO--
--TRY--!
ONE MOMENT: A BLAZING HAND FINDS TERHALI'S EMERALD THROAT, AND STILLS HER ANGUISH-ED CRY...
THE NEXT: TWIN BEAMS OF MATCH-LESS RADIANCE STAB LIKE BLUE-WHITE SWORDS FROM ONCE-ZEPHRA'S EYES...
15.

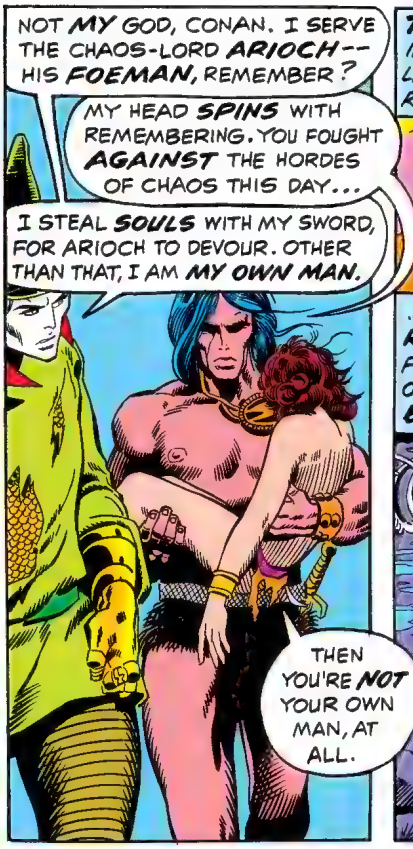
...TEARING THRU TERHALI'S ALL-SHIELDING AURA AS EASILY AS A SHARPENED SCIMITAR MIGHT CLEAVE SOME SPIDER'S GOSSAMER WEB...
...TEARING, RENDING, DESTROYING...!
SCREAMING, THE GREEN EMPRESS FADES...
...DWINDLES...
...DIES!

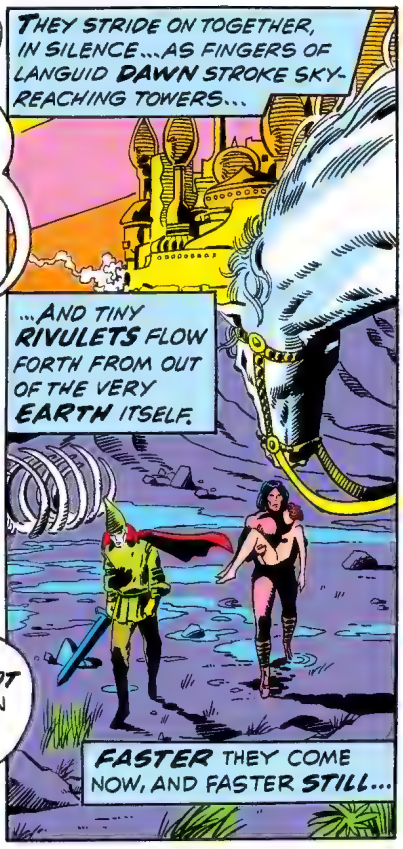

YET, IF THE MAYFLY BE BUT THE CREATURE OF A SINGLE DAY...
...THEN HOW MUCH LONGER MAY ENDURE SHE WHO IS BUT PLAYTHING OF THE FICKLE GODS...?
ZEPHRA!

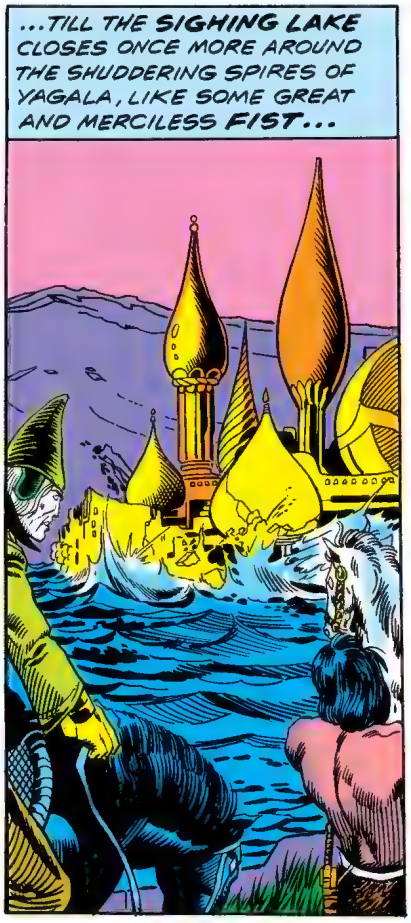

THE LORDS OF LAW HAVE WON ANOTHER GREAT VICTORY, IT SEEMS...

COME, CONAN. YOU CAN DO NO MORE FOR THE ONE WHO CALLED YOU "BELOVED."
SHE IS DEAD ...AND WE STILL LIVE!

BUT FOR HOW LONG, LORD ARKYN?
HOW LONG?
YOUR GOD WINKS OUT OVERHEAD, ELRIC. HE'S GONE.


NOT MY GOD, CONAN. I SERVE THE CHAOS-LORD ARIOCH -- HIS FOEMAN, REMEMBER?
MY HEAD SPINS WITH REMEMBERING. YOU FOUGHT AGAINST THE HORDES OF CHAOS THIS DAY...
I STEAL SOULS WITH MY SWORD, FOR ARIOCH TO DEVOUR. OTHER THAN THAT, I AM MY OWN MAN.
THEN YOU'RE NOT YOUR OWN MAN, AT ALL.


THEY STRIDE ON TOGETHER, IN SILENCE...AS FINGERS OF LANGUID DAWN STROKE SKY-REACHING TOWERS...
...AND TINY RIVULETS FLOW FORTH FROM OUT OF THE VERY EARTH ITSELF.
FASTER THEY COME NOW, AND FASTER STILL...


...TILL THE SIGHING LAKE CLOSES ONCE MORE AROUND THE SHUDDERING SPIRES OF YAGALA, LIKE SOME GREAT AND MERCILESS FIST...

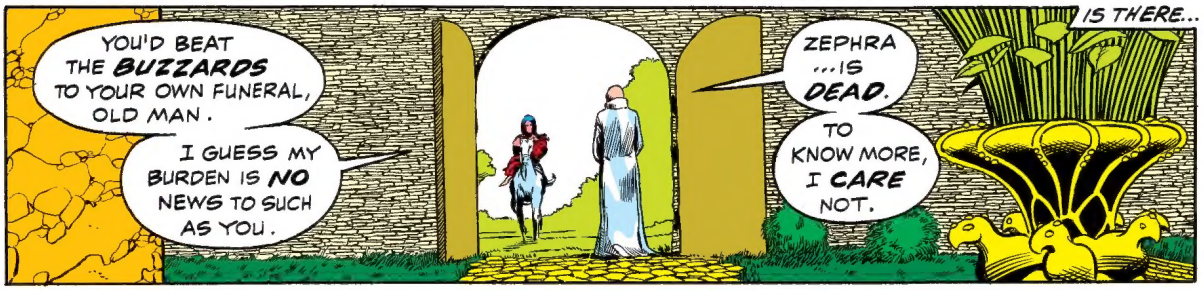
...AND THE ANCIENT PROUD TOWERS CRUMBLE IN THE MANY-COLORED MORN, AND THE LAKE NO LONGER SIGHS...
FOR, THE SOULS OF THE DEAD HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM THEIR WATERY SEPULCHRE, AND ARE NOW AT REST ONCE MORE...

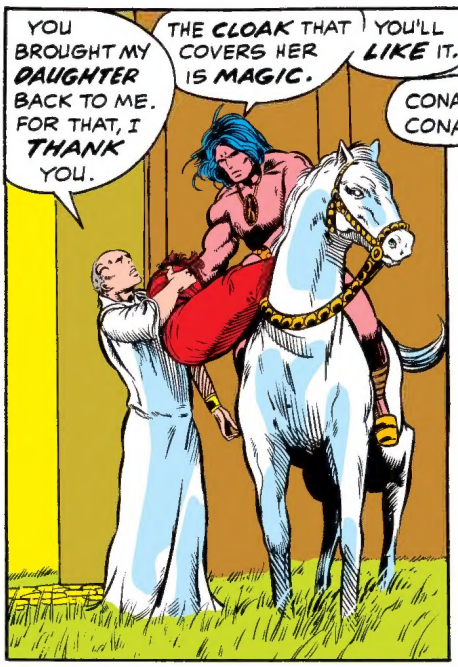
HERE, CONAN. MY CLOAK, TO COVER THE FAIR ZEPHRA.
I MUST TAKE MY LEAVE.
WHY NOT, NOW YOU'VE DONE YOUR DAY'S WORK...
...PURSUED YOUR USELESS QUEST OF SORCEROUS LORE...
...A QUEST THE GIRL PAID FOR, WITH HER LIFE.
YOUR WORDS ARE LACED WITH BITTERNESS. STILL, THERE IS MUCH TRUTH IN WHAT YOU SAY.
I AM, INDEED, A THING OF SORCERY...AND ALL MY ACTIONS ARE BOUND BY IT.
IF WE TWO TOOK THE SAME PATH, SURELY ONE OF US WOULD HAVE TO SLAY THE OTHER, ONE FINE DAY.
BEST I HIE ME TO MY OWN WORLD...AND TO THOSE I LOVE...
LOVE? AN EMPTY WORD TO YOU, WIZARD.
I THINK OUR HUMBLEST PEASANT MUST BE NOBLER THAN THE KINGS OF YOUR OWN WORLD, WHEREVER IT BE.
YOUR RACE IS YOUNG, CONAN ...MINE, AS OLD AS TIME ITSELF...
SEEK NOT TO GAUGE ALL HEARTS, ALL MINDS...
...BY THE IMMATURE MEASURE OF YOUR OWN!
BUT NOW, FAREWELL, BARBARIAN. I SHALL REMEMBER YOU...
...AND YOU, I THINK, SHALL WELL REMEMBER ME...!
THEN, ELRIC IS GONE... VANISHED DOWN CORRIDORS OF BLINDING LIGHT...

...BACK TO THAT EARTH WHERE THE BRIGHT EMPIRE OF MELNIBONÉ STILL FLOURISHES... SIMULTANEOUS WITH CONAN'S HYBORIAN AGE, AND YET A WORLD APART...
FOR, MANY THE PATHS, MANY THE TIMES WHICH CONVERGE IN OUR WORLD OF SIN AND SORROWS...THOUGH ALL BE DARK WITH SHADOWED STAIN OF HUMAN EVIL...!
AND HE WONDERS, DOES ELRIC, IF IT WOULD HAVE HELPED TO TELL CONAN ABOUT CYMORIL...
...CYMORIL, THE BEAUTEOUS LOVE OF ELRIC'S LIFE... CYMORIL, WHO SLEEPS BENEATH THE DREAD SPELL OF YYRKOON, ELRIC'S GREATEST RIVAL...
...CYMORIL, WHOM TERHALI'S MAGIC MIGHT HAVE AWAKENED... BUT NO MORE ...NO MORE...!
NO, HE DECIDES... IT WOULD NOT HAVE HELPED TO TELL CONAN...AND SO, SPURRING HIS MOUNT, HE GALLOPS ON...
...TO A DESTINY MORE STRANGE, MORE WONDROUS, THAN EVEN THE CIMMERIAN SHALL EVER KNOW...!

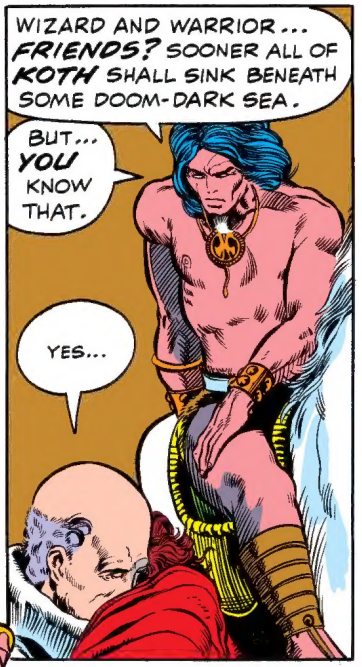
EPILOGUE:

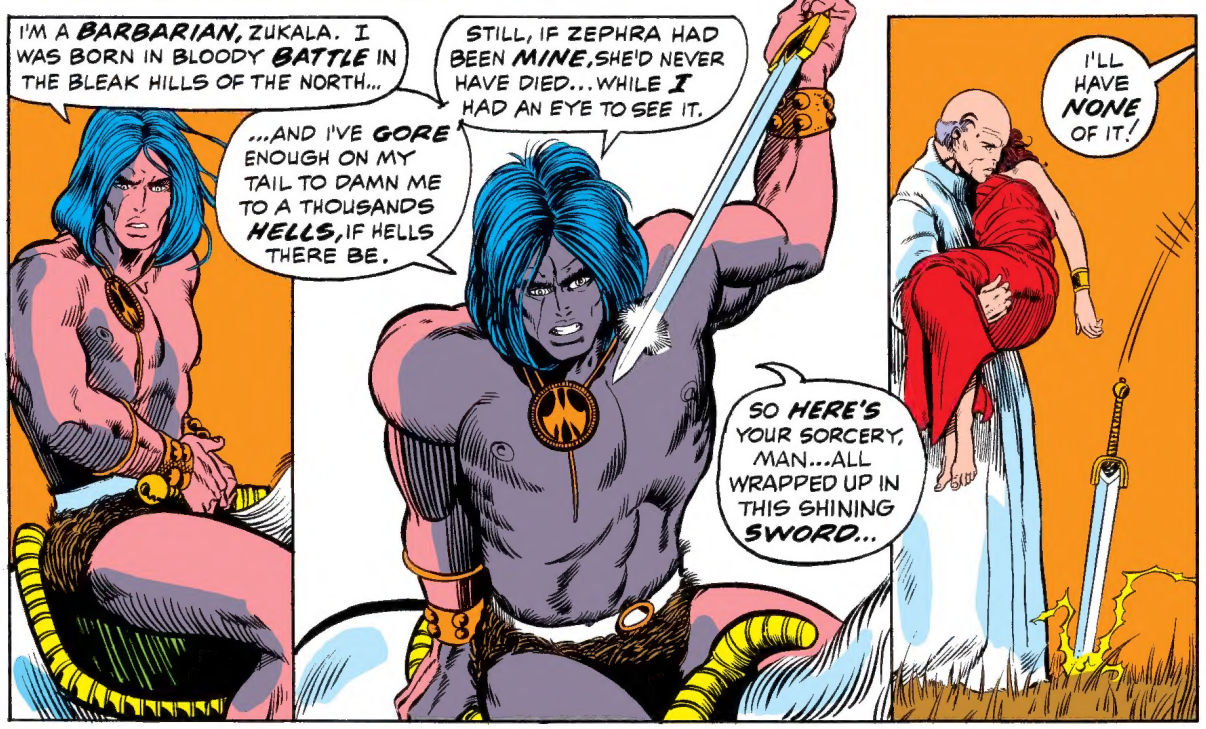
A LOST WIND MURMURS AMONG ROCKS, IN SEARCH OF A SOUL. RAUCOUS RED-BIRDS CALL, HOOTING IT ON ITS WAY. BEFORE A GREAT CARVEN GATE, A HOOF-SORE STEED PAUSES...THE DOORS SWING SLOWLY, SADLY OPEN... AND **ZUKALA** IS THERE...


YOU'D BEAT THE **BUZZARDS** TO YOUR OWN FUNERAL, OLD MAN.
I GUESS MY BURDEN IS **NO** NEWS TO SUCH AS YOU.
ZEPHRA ...IS **DEAD.**
TO KNOW MORE, I **CARE** NOT.



IF WE'D NOT **FOUGHT** LONG MONTHS AGO, **I** WOULD HAVE FACED TERHALI. AND **THEN,** PERHAPS...
COULD WE NOT BE **FRIENDS,** AT LAST...
FOR, I SENSE WE SHARE...A CERTAIN **GRIEF...**




I'M A **BARBARIAN,** ZUKALA. I WAS BORN IN BLOODY **BATTLE** IN THE BLEAK HILLS OF THE NORTH...
...AND I'VE **GORE** ENOUGH ON MY TAIL TO DAMN ME TO A THOUSANDS **HELLS,** IF HELLS THERE BE.
STILL, IF ZEPHRA HAD BEEN **MINE,** SHE'D NEVER HAVE DIED...WHILE **I** HAD AN EYE TO SEE IT.
SO **HERE'S** YOUR SORCERY, MAN...ALL WRAPPED UP IN THIS SHINING **SWORD...**
I'LL HAVE **NONE** OF IT!

NOW, I'VE BUSINESS IN ARGOS ...OR ANY OTHER PLACE THAT NEEDS A GOOD STRONG SWORD-ARM.
I'LL DRINK A TOAST, TO BOTH THE LIVING AND THE DEAD...
...IN THE FIRST TAVERN I FIND.
FAREWELL.
FIN.
BARRY SMITH.

THE HYBORIAN PAGE

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP, 625 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

A MIXED BAG OF MIND-BOGGLING MISSIVES: This issue marks Barry Smith's final appearance as regular artist of CONAN THE BARBARIAN—at least for the time being.

No, no—put away those bombs and brickbats, friends and neighbors—'tis no vile plot of Marvel Comics, playing games of musical chairs with the artist of one of comicdom's most unique strips, but rather the decision and request of Barry himself! For personal reasons, our Shazam-winning young Britisher feels that he would like to move on to other features—and so Stan and Roy (and the rest of Marveldom, we trust) can only concur and wish Barry the best of luck on THE AVENGERS and other mini-epics he'll be producing in the near and far future. The lad wanted to go out with a bang, however—hence he finished this Michael-Moorcock-plotted two-parter, a comic-book event in and of itself, before bidding the mag a regretful adieu.

Starting next issue, gregarious Gil Kane will be teaming up with Roy Thomas (and a special surprise inker whose work we think you'll dig) to continue the reign of the first and only successful sword-and-sorcery comic-mag of all time!

By a weird coincidence, this seems like the best of times (if such there be at all) for changing artists on the strip, since we'll soon be chronicling the adventures of Conan as he leaves the barbarian-thief phase of his life and becomes (as his creator Robert E. Howard originally intended) a mercenary soldier and landless wanderer, in a series of tales adapted from the pen of the great REH himself.

And, one final burst of good news: that forthcoming issue is scheduled to herald CONAN's return to regular monthly publication. So stick around, swordsman—once-a-month wonderment is on the way again!

Dear Marvel Bunch,

I would feel terribly remiss if I didn't write in to congratulate Roy, Barry, and Sal on CONAN #11. I derived a great deal of pleasure from the story and art of "Rogues in the House." Roy Thomas' adaptation was quite faithful to the original, and maintained Howard's same chilling mood—a difficult feat well done!

The quality of Barry Smith's art is what really set me off, though. His work has been steadily improving from the start, and I must say that I found this set of drawings particularly pleasing. Barry's picture concepts are terrific and the amount of rich detail (and Sal Buscema's embellishment thereof) are awe-inspiring. Though I've never illustrated a full comic, I've done a few short comic tales, illustrated pulps, and worked on the Tarzan strip. I know what work went into CONAN #11!

Please accept my compliments on a superb piece of work.

William Stout, 2003 N. Beachwood Dr. #11
Hollywood, Calif. 90068

Compliments acknowledged, Bill—and we hope that one day soon we're acknowledging still another letter from you talking about an issue of CONAN which has surpassed even our epic eleventh issue, which has probably garnered as much overwhelmingly favorable mail as any mag which mighty Marvel ever published.

Conan's life being what it was (in the world of fiction, anyhow), it'll be a while before Roy and Gil are able to adapt any more actual Conan prose into comics form—but they have some other REH adaptations coming up which'll move and shake you, beginning with next issue's tale—"The Gods of Bal-Sagoth!" See you then, right?

Dear Sirs:

Take it from a true sword-and-sorcery fan: CONAN THE BARBARIAN is a masterpiece! Like so many before me, I have found it impossible to remain silent about the marvelous job you've done with this magazine. I have been a fan of Robert E. Howard for time time, and I've longed to see his greatest creation in illustrated form. Now it has happened, thru the fantastic work of Marvel Comics. The artwork by Barry Smith in CONAN #11 is really something else! But I guess that goes for every CONAN mag published so far (and I haven't missed one).

Having read and re-read the REH novels, I expected (sorry, Stan, Roy, and Barry) the worst. Instead I found an overall job which I think anyone else would be hard-put even to equal, let alone surpass. No more lack of faith from this Marvelite!

Now that you have had so much success with Conan and Kull, have you thought about branching out into other Howardian characters? Things could really be done with Bran Mak Morn and Solomon Kane. Not to mention Esau Cairn (Almuric)and Breckinridge Elkins from Bear Creek. How about considering it, at least?

Bill Orlikow, 7 Glencoe Avenue
Winnipeg 15, Man., Canada

We've gone a bit further than that, friend. Not only is Kull back in harness as the lead feature in MONSTERS ON THE PROWL (and don't be too surprised if he's got his own mag any day now!), but Roy is hard at work with genial Gene Colan on an adventure starring Solomon Kane, the Puritan swashbuckler who was one of REH's earliest creations. As for any of the other Howard heroes you mention above, lad—well, let's just wait and see, shall we? In the meantime, sneak a peek at the current issue of CREATURES ON THE LOOSE and its spanking new feature "Gullivar Jones, Warrior of Mars," and see if it'll keep you out of the pool hall till Breck Elkins and Bran Mak Morn come galloping along...

KNOW YE THESE, THE HALLOWED RANKS OF MARVELDOM:

R.F.O. (Real Frantic One)—A buyer of at least 3 Marvel mags a month.

T.T.B. (Titanic True Believer) — A divinely-inspired 'No-Prize' winner.

Q.N.S. (Quite 'Nuff Sayer) — A fortunate frantic one who's had a letter printed.

K.O.F. (Keeper Of the Flame) — One who recruits a newcomer to Marvel's rollickin' ranks.

P.M.M. (Permanent Marvelite Maximus) —Anyone possessing all four of the other titles.

F.F.F. (Fearless Front-Facer) — An honorary title bestowed for devotion to Marvel above and beyond the call of duty.